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Problems faced by University Coordinators of Professional Competency Enhancement Program for Teachers (PCEPT) conducted by Higher Education Commission in Pakistan

ABSTRACT

The major focus of the study was to identify the problems faced by the course coordinators of one month Professional Competency Enhancement Program for Teachers (PCEPT) conducted by Higher Education Commission at the doorstep of all the public sector universities of Pakistan. The study was descriptive in nature and questionnaire was used to gather information about the nature and intensity of problems they faced during PCEPT program implementation. Population of

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study consisted of 51 university coordinators. Using stratified random sample method, 30 coordinators were selected for data collection. The responses were analyzed using mean percentages. The major problems pointed out by University Coordinators were getting nominations of faculty members from within the university and surrounding universities; insufficient financial allocation in some budget heads; finding expert resource persons for quality instructional delivery. For future training programs it is recommended that a pool of expert resource persons may be developed; some incentives may be given for attending the course in order to make it attractive for the participants.

Keywords: Problems; Course participants, Course Coordinators, PCEPT program

Introduction

The quality of teaching and learning in higher education has been seriously addressed over the past few decades through improving instruction. Due to this evolution, the topic of instructional development through the capacity building of teachers is emerging around the globe. Due to heavy investment in the field of instructional development, the concerned authorities are questioning the instructional developing units that whether their efforts are paying back desired results or not (Brew 2007). Faculty development is one of the key pillars of Higher Education Commission's strategic reforms. In order to bring quality in the higher education classrooms, there was a need for constant quality enhancement process of the existing faculty serving in HEI's across Pakistan. Keeping in view this goal, National Academy

of Higher Education (NAHE) project was launched in 2004, in order to cater the professional development and pedagogical skills enhancement needs of the university faculty across Pakistan. NAHE was launched with the mission of extending professional development support at the doorstep of universities. In this regard one month Professional Competency Enhancement Program for Teachers (PCEPT) was launched in September, 2008.

NAHE extended support to 51 public sector universities across Pakistan through this course. In total, 1577 faculty members were imparted training through this course till now. PCEPT is the most far reaching and widely appreciated program of NAHE/HEC having the specialty of enhancing the teaching skills in a very limited budgetary framework supporting the universities at the doorsteps.

It is important to analyze the stakeholders' opinion regarding the problems they faced during the implementation of the training program. This would help to improve the program implementation in future.

Objectives of the Study

Following were the objectives of the study: (a) to identify the coordination problems faced by the coordinators of one month PCEPT program in the universities; (b) to analyze the problems encountered during managing the expenses of the program; and (c) to find out the academic and administrative barriers in smooth implementation of the program at universities of Pakistan.

Review of Literature

Teachers' Preparation International Perspective published at State University's website, reported that in many developing countries, there is a dire need of teachers having teaching aptitude and in comparison to the demand, less are entering in the profession, therefore this situation is providing a fertile ground for the initiation and regularization of alternative teacher training programmes. The training programmes already employed, usually include a substantial component of in-service training, and most of the time begin with a 'crash course' on pedagogical content knowledge and these programmes are of a shorter duration. (Berry, 2001). Many research studies suggest that it is even more important to evaluate the training program before repeating it in next phase.

Researchers are of the view that the major purpose of evaluation of the training program is to help the mangers to determine the effectiveness of the training process and outputs and suggesting further improvements in the program for greater impact. It helps the management to change their policies accordingly. For different stages in a process or training, there are different evaluation strategies which serve the purpose appropriately.

Some researchers define effective evaluation as:

"Evaluation is purposeful if it is intended to validate or ensure that the goals of the instruction are achieved and to improve the instruction, by mean of identification and subsequent remediation of problematic aspects if required'' – (Weston, McAlpine, and Bordonaro (1995) as cited in Holcomb, 1993).

Bordonaro's definition is comprehensive but it has not emphasized on the procedural components of the program evaluation. The training evaluation is helpful if it intends to

bring betterment in the quality of the implementation of the program, not only in terms of the instructional quality but also in terms of organization of the program i.e. logistics, academic content quality and instructional quality. The benchmark for evaluation is to identify and suggest remedies towards the problematic areas of the program.

Five research studies were conducted (Brauchle and Jerich, 1998; Harnish and Wild, 1993; Postareff et. al., 2007; Slavit et. al., 2003; Stepp-Greany, 2004). The study by Harnish and Wild (1993) included four cases and in which the problematic areas of the training programs were explored. The studies reported many significant areas of improvement in terms of logistics of the program. The study by Slavit et. al., (2003) was case based. The participants' revealed that they were provided with the resources for conducting several activities during the training. The study conducted by Stepp-Greany (2004) found that training managers should have handful of resources in order to cater to the needs of the training group. He pointed out that an effective training is based on actual classroom situation and it does leave a remarkable impact on the participants' of the training program.

Brauchle and Jerich (1998) concluded if a program is effectively coordinated, the participants would get sound knowledge about their professional roles and responsibilities. that their participation in professional development program helped teachers in enhancing their teaching ability, classroom presentation skills and skills to improve students evaluation. An analysis of 23 interviews in the study conducted by Postareff et. al. (2007) revealed that teachers developed reflective skills during training programs. Studies related to the quality of the professional development programs focused on the features of effective

programs. A study conducted by Baker and Smith (2006) identified the following features of an effective professional development programme helpful in sustaining change in teachers:

- An emphasis on providing expert facilitators for leading the program;
- Conceptual and technical aspects of instruction are taught through activities;
- Sufficient financial resources for managing the expenses;
- Teachers are provided with frequent opportunities to get themselves involved and evaluate their own teaching styles.

Methodology of the Research

The research approach was predominantly quantitative in nature. However, some qualitative mode of data in the form of open ended questions was also collected in the survey. The study aimed at exploring the opinions of University Coordinators of Professional Competency Enhancement Program for Teachers (PCEPT) about the administrative hurdles they faced during the smooth implementation of the program at the doorstep of universities. The modus operandi of conducting the courses at the door step of universities was that the University Vice-Chancellor nominates a senior faculty member preferably Head of Department or Dean of a faculty as Coordinator for conducting the course. The coordinator becomes the point of contact for Higher Education Commission in smooth organization of the course. He/she is provided every type of guidance from National Academy of Higher Education (NAHE)/HEC in all matters related to the PCEPT course.

Population and Sample

The population of the study included all the university coordinators of one month Professional Competency Enhancement Program for Teachers (PCEPT). In total 51 coordinators made the total population of the study. Out of the total population, 30 University Coordinators were selected through stratified random sampling technique. Strata's were made in order to have a proportionate representation of all the provinces.

Research Instrument and Data Collection

A survey questionnaire was developed in which the statements were developed on a bipolar scaling method i.e. the five point Likert scale with the categories of 'very high extent'; 'high extent'; 'uncertain'; 'low extent'; and 'very low extent'. These were developed to assess the problems faced by the university coordinators in managing and coordinating the program activities. Keeping in view the suggestions of Babbie (2008) the frequencies of 'Very Higher Extent' and 'High Extent' were added up to arrive at a conclusion. Similarly Very Low Extent and Low Extent were combined to avoid thin distribution of data. After validation of tool and expert opinion researchers personally involved themselves in data gathering process. The questionnaire was distributed to all the 31 University Coordinators and in response to that 30 filled questionnaires were returned. The responses of the coordinators are presented in tabular form:

Results and Discussion

Table 2: Consolidated analysis of the Problems Faced by University Coordinators of PCEPT Program

S.No	Problem areas	Disagree	No opinion	Agree	Statistics α=0.05
1	Drop out of the participants	73.33	00	26.67	{26.67 ± 1.96 x 8.07(SE)} i.e. 10.85 < 26.67 < 42.48 was significant
2	Call for nominations	33.33	00	66.67	{66.67 ± 1.96 x 8.60(SE)} i.e. 49.81 < 66.67 < 83.52 was significant
3	Maintaining Participants attendance	40.00	00	60.00	{60.00 ± 1.96 x 8.94(SE)} i.e. 42.48 < 60.0 < 77.52; was significant
4	engaging expert Resource Persons	20.00	16.67	63.33	{63.33 ± 1.96 x 6.5(SE)} i.e. 50.59 < 63.33 < 76.07 was significant
5	Maintaining participants' interest	63.33	10.00	26.67	{26.67 ± 1.96 x 7.5(SE)} i.e. 11.97 < 26.67 < 41.37 was significant
6	In-time start of sessions	80.00	6.67	13.33	{13.33 ± 1.96 x 5.96(SE)} i.e. 1.65 < 13.33 < 25.01 was significant
7	Accommodation for the Resource Persons	83.33	3.33	13.33	{13.33 ± 1.96 x 6.09(SE)} i.e. 1.40 < 13.33 < 25.27 was significant
8	Transport facility for the Resource Person	63.33	00	36.67	{36.67 ± 1.96 x 8.8(SE)} i.e. 19.42 < 36.67 < 53.91 was significant
9	Procedural delays in collecting advance amount from the university	66.67	3.33	30.0	{30.0 ± 1.96 x 8.16(SE)} i.e. 14.01 < 30.0 < 45.99 was significant
10	Coordination problems with NAHE	83.33	3.33	13.33	{13.33 ± 1.96 x 6.09(SE)} i.e. 1.40 < 13.33 < 25.27 was significant
11	Handling accounts related matters	23.33	3.33	73.33	{73.33 ± 1.96 x 7.55(SE)} i.e. 58.54 < 73.33 < 88.13 was significant
12	Getting accounts clearance by Resident Auditors	6.67	00	93.33	{93.33 ± 1.96 x 4.55(SE)} i.e. 84.42 < 93.33 < 102.25 was significant
13	Getting accounts clearance from NAHE/HEC	36.67	00	63.33	{63.33 ± 1.96 x 8.8(SE)} i.e. 46.09 < 63.33 < 80.58 was significant

Table 3: "If you agree with statement number 10; please specify the nature of problem"

Options	Frequency	Percent
Handling queries	01	3.33
Non Responsiveness	0	0
Timely provision of information	0	0
Any other...	Funds and accounts related problems Provision of Resource Person	

In response to the statement only one respondent said that he faced problems with NAHE regarding handling of queries. Two respondents mentioned problems other than those specified and these were problem of funds release and accounts related problems by NAHE/HEC and one

highlighted provision of quality resource persons by the project NAHE.

"If you agree with statement 12; please specify the nature of difficulty"

In response to the statement, 04 coordinators said that due to lack of training they had problem of handling accounts related matters of PCEPT course. 18 coordinators were of the view that university's accounts staff didn't cooperate with them and that's why they faced difficulties. 02 of the respondents were of the view that they didn't get any clear directions from NAHE's office regarding the whole procedure of accounts submission and processing.
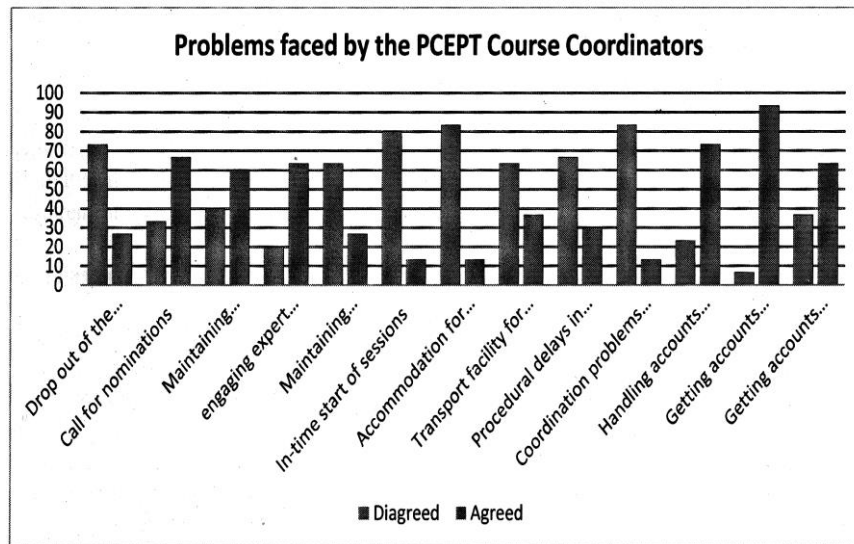

Figure 1. Problems faced by the PCEPT Course Coordinators

Table 4: "Use the option "Sufficient" and "Non-sufficient" against each of the budget head allocated for the program"

S.No	Budget Heads	Sufficient	In-sufficient
1	Honorarium to Program Participants	07 (23%)	23 (77%)
2	Honorarium for Lectures	01 (3%)	29 (97%)
3	Honorarium for Support Staff	8 (27%)	22 (73%)
4	Remuneration to University Coordinator	13 (43%)	17 (57%)
5	TA/DA to Outstation Resource Persons	18 (60%)	12 (40%)
6	Stationary and Photocopy	5 (17%)	25 (83%)
7	Contingencies	6 (20%)	24 (80%)

From the comparative analysis of the allocation of budget in each of the subheads, it is evident that participants were of the view that almost in all subheads the budget allocation was in-sufficient as per the actual requirement. 97% of the coordinators were of the view that budget was insufficient in the subhead Honorarium for Lecturers, 83% were of the view that there was shortage of budget in the stationary and photocopy head, 80% were of the view that contingencies allocation was not sufficient as per the requirements of the course. In total, 77% coordinators pointed out that Honorarium to the participants was not sufficient keeping in view the duration of the PCEPT course. 73% coordinators were of the view that the amount allocated for the support staff compensation was non-sufficient, 57% highlighted that

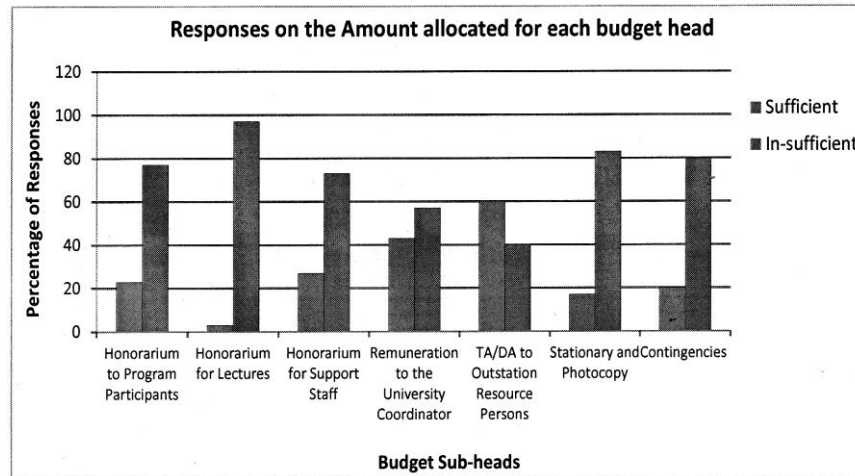Remuneration to University coordinator was not sufficient as per their extra workload.

Figure 2. Responses of Coordinators on the budget Allocation with in subheads

Results Discussion

Regarding the problems faced by the course coordinators of the program some coordinators pointed out that they faced the problem of less allocation of finances in the subheads of the training program. They received complaints from the resource persons regarding the amount of remuneration resource persons were paid. Keeping in view the high inflation, the problem was very genuine. Moreover another problem which some of the coordinators faced was that they didn't receive the funding in their own hands, and for meeting day to day expenses of the training like refreshments, remuneration to the resource persons stationary and photocopies, they had to look up for the Treasurer offices of the universities, this procedural delay created hurdles in timely

payments to different vendors/service providers. This is a research based fact that more the resources the allocated for a training program, better the organization of the program would be. One organizational factor which effects the organizers satisfaction with instructional development programs may be related to the degree of control he/she has over the design and implementation of the processes (Edmonds and Lee, 2002; Gercenshte in, Fogelman, and Yaphe, 2002), and processes are greatly determined by the way financial resources for these programs are allocated to the institution.

Some coordinators gave a solution that instead of imposing a uniform formula for the allocation of funding, universities may be provided an option to develop the financial block for the training program according to their own requirements and submit the plan to Higher Education Commission for the release of funds. This procedure will take into account the geographical differences of the universities and corresponding financial requirements. For example the problem of hiring outstation resource person was one of the most overwhelming problems faced by the coordinators due to financial constraints. In the far flung areas like Uthal, Khuzdar and Larkana etc the required expertise were not available in the neighboring universities so the resource persons were to be hired from capital or big cities like Lahore Karachi etc. this hiring cost their air fare to reach at the venue and resultantly the cost overall exceeded the amount allocated for the particular subhead of "TA/DA to outstation Resource Persons". So if budgeting was done by the university itself, this problem would have been kept in mind during financial planning.

The research regarding the funds allocation for training shows that allocation of resources for professional development programs can take both form i.e. direct or indirect (Nir, 2003). In case of direct allocation of resources institutions are given option to design the program themselves from selection of the experts to financial requirements that best fit individual institutional needs, built-in the plan. This strategy allows, through the reallocation of resources and combining funding sources, increasing funds for professional development, which may help to form a coherent professional development strategy (Elmore and Burney (1996) and Elmore and Burney (1999, March); Garet et al., (2001). Indirect allocation of resources mean that resources are transferred from the centrally governing body like HEC o the decentralized units like universities. Under these circumstances, resources may not be allocated according to the institutional needs and preferences, and that's why seems irrelevant to the contextual requirements and real educational consequences (Yair, 2005).

Conclusion

The study was conducted to analyze the problems faced by the university coordinators of PCEPT program. This was a one month generic teaching skills enhancement program for the university teachers conducted by HEC at the doorstep of universities. The problems identified by training program coordinators were multifold. Majority of the coordinators faced the problem of getting nomination form the university departments. Almost all the coordinators faced difficulties in the accounts related matters specifically when it came to financial adjustment with HEC. The respondents also

pointed out the insufficient budget allocation given by HEC for organizing different components of the training program. Keeping in view the problems, some recommendations were proposed to make the future program more effective and qualitative.

Recommendations

Keeping in view the objectives and results of the study, following recommendations are proposed:
1. A pool of expert trainers may be built in order to bring improvement in the quality of delivery of the resource material.
2. Call for resource persons may be advertised in newspapers for searching expertise on open merit.
3. A transparent criterion should be made for the selection of the resource persons across different fields.
4. Funds for the training program may be increased in all the subheads.

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